

VZCZCXRO5315
OO RUEHDE
DE RUEHMS #1059/01 3361403
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O R 021403Z DEC 09
FM AMEMBASSY MUSCAT
TO RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL IMMEDIATE
RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1016
INFO GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RHMFISS/USCENTCOM POLITICAL ADVISOR MACDILL AFB FL

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MUSCAT 001059

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2019/12/02

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SOCI](#) [MU](#)

SUBJECT: (C) Omani Engage with Gen. Petraeus: A Snapshot of Omani Concerns and Viewpoints

CLASSIFIED BY: Richard J. Schmierer, Ambassador, STATE, EXEC; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: On November 16, Ambassador Richard Schmierer hosted a dinner in honor of visiting CENTCOM Commander GEN David Petraeus with six leading Omani intellectuals, four men and two women, from different walks of life. The lively and candid dinner conversation provided insight into Omani views on topics ranging from the Arab-Israeli dispute to American attitudes towards Islam to press freedom and the information revolution. There was strong and unanimous agreement on the need to strengthen civil society in Oman and throughout the Arab world. An overview of the issues discussed follows. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) At a November 16 dinner at the Ambassador's residence, GEN Petraeus asked the six Omani intellectuals in attendance to share their thoughts on whatever current topics they felt were important to Oman, the region, or the U.S.-Omani relationship. The attendees were eager and articulate in responding to the General's request:

¶3. (C) A male CEO of an Omani investment company (and a leader in supporting the growth of Omani entrepreneurism) expressed concern over the newly-announced Omani labor law and how suddenly it was imposed. He noted that its Omanization provisions will be onerous and will harm investment and economic growth in the country. While companies in Oman do want to Omanize, the attendees agreed that there is not the trained Omani manpower available for companies to successfully do so. There was general acknowledgement of the need to improve education and training in Oman, particularly technical training.

¶4. (C) A male journalist active in the Sultanate's writers' and journalists' associations raised the issue of the Arab-Israeli dispute and the continued negative impact which this issue - and perceptions concerning U.S. policy on the issue - has on overall attitudes in the region towards the U.S. He stressed that the pervasive negative portrayal of American policy and efforts in the media on this point has a particularly harmful impact on young people in the region, who watch a lot of TV and surf the internet, where this message is quite strong.

¶5. (C) A younger, female lawyer and political activist, who has participated in both exchange and in-country USG programming, raised her concern with the, in her view, lack of adequate legal support and education for Omani women. She expressed disappointment at recent developments concerning American Bar Association programs in Oman, which she perceives to be decreasing in scope and which, for some time now, have, in her experience, reduced their efforts directed at women's legal issues and rights.

16. (C) A journalists active in academe raised the need to expand the envelope for journalists and the media in Oman. He discussed cases of Omani bloggers being confronted by the government, and noted that media coverage of "negative" issues in society should not necessarily be seen as "critical" or "attacking" of governments, but rather as a means for societies to identify and address their shortcomings.

17. (C) A cosmopolitan middle-aged lawyer, active in civil society, who recently returned from a visit to Richmond, VA and New York where he undertook speaking engagements -- including to Jewish groups, and in synagogues -- expressed concern given his perception of misunderstanding, and even animosity, on the part of many Americans concerning Islam and Muslims.

18. (C) An older, socially-conservative female ministry official, active in legal and international-trade issues, expressed surprisingly strong (and critical) views of U.S. anti-terrorism policies and practices, especially citing Guantanamo and torture. While General Petraeus was able to educate her considerably on what was clearly a lack of knowledge of the actual history and current status of these policies and practices, her comments provided a helpful reminder that even highly educated, knowledgeable Arabs can be very misinformed about the actual facts and the complexity of

MUSCAT 00001059 002 OF 002

such issues. Thus, they can develop very emotional and highly critical views about aspects of the U.S. based on the incomplete, poor, or slanted information. Such misperceptions then become pervasive in the region.
Hurtado